

Book Reviews

Vamplew, Wray. *Pay Up and Play the Game: Professional Sport in Britain, 1875-1914*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Pp. xix, 394. Appendices, notes, index. \$54.50.

This is an excellent study which richly deserves the NAASH book award, which it won in 1988, as the best scholarly work published in the field of sport history that year. It is based on a very wide range of primary and secondary sources and succeeds in placing British professional sport quite squarely in its historical context. It is the first attempt by an economic historian to apply economic analysis on such a scale to this kind of data and it should serve as a useful model for other economic historians who wish to develop this genre of scholarly writing.

Wray Vamplew has done here for the economists what many social historians have been attempting to do during the last twenty years. He has demolished a host of myths which were allowed to flourish in the first place because professional historians and economists had for too long distanced themselves from the study of sport. He has shown, among other things, that the good old age of Victorian amateurism was largely a figment of the journalists' imagination and has demonstrated convincingly that the commercialization of British sport began long before the twentieth century.

Vamplew began on the premise that economists have a vital role to play in writing the history of sport since sport has always been a significant sector of the national economy. Sport has traditionally been such a vital feature of British life that it deserves to be analysed by economists, even if the economic behaviour of sportsmen and sports entrepreneurs has often defied normal economic theories and expectations. To him, the story of sport is one involving land, labour, employment, profits, losses and investments. It has to do with the buying and selling of a huge range of products and services. It is considerably more complicated than a simple matter of fun and games. Thus he integrates a remarkable body of disparate materials (including club records, newspaper files, scholarly and other articles, academic theses, economic surveys and social histories), and throws a refreshing ray of light on such subjects as fees, deficits, crowds, players, clubs, associations, shareholders and directors. He also analyses the attitudes and behaviour of professionals, amateurs and managers in a balanced and intelligent manner.

After castigating his academic colleagues for entering the debate on the meaning and importance of sport long after the social historians had been persuaded to do so, Vamplew skilfully outlines the historical background and presents a very good description of social and economic conditions prevailing

in Britain from about 1750 onwards. He shows that, despite the relative shortage of food and energy, the pre-industrial multitude became so addicted to sport and recreation that even the stringent laws of the Puritans in the seventeenth century could have but little lasting effect. He also deals very competently with the impact of the moral and industrial revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In looking critically at the progress of professionalization in British sports, Vamplew focuses mainly on cricket, horse racing, rugby and soccer. He examines the relationships between the controlling organizations and the players and makes some perceptive observations about the roles of such institutions as the Football Association, the Jockey Club and the Marylebone Cricket Club. He naturally concludes that the laws and conventions were basically one-sided and tended to place the professionals almost always at a disadvantage. But he is not surprised at their failure to form trade unions at the very time when the labour movement seemed to be gathering such strength in Britain. After all, the conditions of employment were somewhat unique in the sporting arena. The players tended to see themselves as skilled competitors rather than as cooperative members of a united group of artisans with common interests and grievances. The soccer players had better luck in forming a union at the beginning of the twentieth century, but they were still too weak to make much of an impact on the management in those days.

In these discussions, Vamplew is at his best when dealing with soccer and horse racing. The available material for a study of these two sports is quite extensive and he has made ample use of it. His own knowledge of the turf, on which he has written a great deal in the past, is unexcelled. More monographic work still needs to be done on cricket and rugby before general conclusions can safely be drawn. But even in cricket, Vamplew has been able to find access to more county club records than any other scholar thus far and his treatment of late nineteenth century cricket finance is consequently much sounder than mine or Mandle's.

On the whole, this is an exemplary study which sports sociologists, cultural anthropologists and social historians will enjoy reading. They will certainly find it worthwhile. The economists will also find the numerous tables and appendices very informative indeed. Wray Vamplew, in a word, has produced a marvelous book which I genuinely wish I had written myself.

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